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AUTHOR	Coontz, Stephanie
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ABSTRACT

The pessimists' view is that the U.S. family is collapsing; on the other hand, optimists view it is as merely diversifying. Too often, both camps begin with an ahistorical, static notion of what the family was like before the contemporary period. Noting that the actual complexity of our history gets buried under the weight of an idealized image, this book exposes as myths many "memories" of traditional family life, showing that families have always been in flux and often in crises; they have never lived up to nostalgic notions about "the way things used to be." The book's chapters are: (1) "The Way We Wish We Were: Defining the Family Crisis"; (2) "'Leave It to Beaver' and 'Ozzie and Harriet': American Families in the 1950s"; (3) "'My Mother Was a Saint': Individualism, Gender Myths, and the Problem of Love"; (4) "We Always Stood on Our Own Two Feet: Self-Reliance and the American Family"; (5) "Strong Families, the Foundation of a Virtuous Society: Family Values and Civic Responsibility"; (6) "A Man's Home Is His Castle: The Family and Outside Intervention"; (7) "Bra-Burners and Family Bashers: Feminism, Working Women, Consumerism, and the Family"; (8) "'First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage, Then Comes Mary with the Baby Carriage': Marriage, Sex, and Reproduction"; (9) "Toxic Parents, Supermoms, and Absent Fathers: Putting Parenting in Perspective"; (10) "Pregnant Girls, Wilding Boys, Crack Babies, and the Underclass: The Myth of Black Family Collapse"; and (11) "The Crisis Reconsidered." The book's epilogue, "Inventing a New Tradition," suggests that the best thing families can do, however "family" is defined, is to get involved in community or political action to help others. The book contains extensive references for each chapter and a select bibliography. (HTH)

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